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Viewing cable 07ANKARA2223, TURKEY: ALL EYES ON PRESIDENT GUL

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07ANKARA2223	2007-08-28 15:19	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: ALL EYES ON PRESIDENT GUL

REF: A. ANKARA 2213

[B. ANKARA 2194 AND PREVIOUS](#)

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: The Turkish parliament elected FM Abdullah Gul as Turkey's 11th President on August 28 with 339 votes. Gul was sworn in at 6 pm local. All but the Republican People's Party (CHP) attended the voting; CHP continued its boycott of both the vote and the swearing in. The Turkish General Staff (TGS) did not attend the swearing in. Gul's ascendancy to the presidency -- Ataturk's seat in Cankaya -- remains a difficult pill to swallow for the military and staunch secularists. Buyukanit's uncompromising August 27 statement (ref A) underscored what everyone already knew: all critical eyes will be on Gul, who will enjoy no honeymoon. His presidency means enormous responsibility for Gul personally and substantial opportunity for Turkey: if he performs impartially and well, his continued focus on foreign policy and outreach to world leaders could play to Turkey's -- and our -- advantage. How it plays will depend on how both Gul and PM Erdogan's soon-to-be-formed new government deal with the inevitable scrutiny by the secular opposition and institutions strongly backed by the military. End summary and comment.

¶2. (SBU) The Turkish parliament on August 28 elected FM Abdullah Gul Turkey's 11th President in the third and decisive round of presidential voting. A simple majority of the 550-member parliament was needed to elect the new president. Gul garnered 339 of the 448 votes cast -- those of his own Justice and Development Party (AKP). The 20 pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) MPs attended and, for the third time, cast blank votes. The Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and Democratic Left Party (DSP) deputies all showed, each voting for their own party's candidate. MHP made good on its pledge not to obstruct the process, despite having been excoriated in the ultranationalist press for enabling Gul's election. Immediately after the Speaker announced the election results, PM Erdogan publicly thanked, in the name of democracy, all political parties who participated.

¶3. (C) CHP continued its head-in-the-sand approach, boycotting both the parliamentary session and Gul's swearing in. CHP vice chair Mustafa Ozyurek has stated publicly that CHP will respect the office of the President, though CHP will scrutinize Gul's actions as President to ensure the country does not start to edge away from secular democracy.

¶4. (SBU) Following the election, Parliament Speaker Toptan delivered the document confirming Gul's election as President to the FM at his Residence. The swearing in took place at parliament at 6 pm local time. Neither outgoing president Sezer's wife Semra, nor Gul's wife Hayrunisa (whose headscarf secularists see as the symbol of creeping Islam) were present. Representatives of the TGS did not attend, though they have attended previous presidential swearing in ceremonies. A ceremonial military honor guard, consisting of all Turkish military services, gave Gul full honors just before he entered parliament to take the oath of office. Immediately after the oath taking, the new President -- clearly moved -- delivered an initial speech in which he pledged to work tirelessly and impartially for all Turks. "My door will be open to everyone," he closed.

¶5. (C) All eyes will be on President Gul as he shoulders enormous responsibility. He must separate from his political past and, as Turkey's President, act above politics. Yet he will be a key political actor -- a role from which Sezer largely demurred. How Gul defines his relationship with his former AKP colleagues will be key. Recent surveys show that Turks believe Gul -- a former PM and FM, who speaks fluent English and calls many world leaders his friends -- is well qualified for the job. Therein lies great opportunity for Turkey as a regional actor, and for US interests in the region.

WILSON